



Civil Rights Commission
2009 Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. Essay Contest

"The Dream Marches On: The Uniting of All Races"

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The Dream Marches On

Language Arts
October 29, 2009

All good things don't happen without a fight. Blood, tears, and death have to occur before change happens. They sang "we shall overcome" while marching into vicious police dogs and skin-tearing fire hoses. They persevered through several arrests and beatings they got because they knew they were right. Headed by the man with the dream, the Civil Rights movement happened and changed the United States. Now, almost 50 years later, the dream marches on.

Dr. King's life was founded on the thought of giving equal rights to everyone because we are equal in God's eyes. We are not viewed African American and Caucasian in the Lord's vision. We are seen as human beings and are not judged by the way we look, but by the way we act. All people who were active in the Civil Rights movement believed this.

Martin Luther King Jr. was the president of the Southern Leadership Conference (SCLC) and his core supporters were from this organization. They marched miles and got beaten. He believed in taking the high road and not retaliating when African American protesters were reprimanded and

assaulted during demonstrations and got more support. Dr. King walked alongside his followers and faced the same consequences. After several years Dr. King became an example and inspired other to finish what he started. These people got laws passed that outlawed segregation and integrated schools. He was able to bring all this change for the African American race, but what about the other ethnicities?

The change after the Civil Rights movement was phenomenal. The United States' government used to be made up of all Caucasian men. In 1928, Oscar Stanton De Priest became the first African American to be elected to the United States' congress. Since then, one hundred twenty three African Americans have served in congress. This shows that our country has been able to look past skin color and elect representatives based on politics. This is what Dr. King wanted to happen after his death. The spirit of the dream is traveling and making change.

Our country is called the United States of America. Most people consider "united" being that all fifty states work in harmony and that Washington is not trying to be its own country. I believe that to be united, the individual people within our country have to act as one people. Already we have unified enough to elect an African American president, but the job is not finished even though many have already retired. We seem to forget

that Native Americans and Latinos when we say that the dream has been accomplished. Thankfully, people inspired by Dr. King are working toward expanding “the dream” to include these people in the bond that makes the United States, the most powerful country in the world.

Discrimination has happened to all ethnicities but some of the atrocities have been silenced or forgotten by society. One group of people who were hurt was the Native Americans. They were the first people to arrive in North America. They shared their land and taught the pilgrims how to survive. Soon the European immigrants began to trick the Native Americans and slowly lessen their population. In the end, the people who really own the land are confined to reservations. Also, treaties were signed so that Native Americans are not a part of the U.S. They don't pay taxes and can sell fireworks, but they aren't protected by the Constitution.

The deep cut in the Native American race has not healed yet. In society they are discriminated against because of their heritage. Companies are reluctant to hire Native Americans because of degrading stereotypes that have come into common use today. Yet despite all the woe that has come to Native Americans, they still have a dream. They want to move forward and be included more prominently in this nation. Wilma Mankiller is the chief of the Cherokee tribe and a Native American activist. She helps

reverse stereotypes and petitions political leaders to help provide equal opportunities. She goes forth realizing what has been done for African Americans and wants the same for the Native Americans. She wants to form a "more perfect union" (excerpt from the Preamble of the United States Constitution).

The most recent discrimination is aimed at Latinos. Many left Central America to escape war or torture, but come to face unexplained hate. They are said to be "illegal aliens" because they cross the border without the proper papers. They are accused of stealing government benefits from other people. Also, debates have been occurring on the topic of whether to allow southern immigrants to have public education. In addition, since they don't have their papers they are undocumented and are considered "not here". Because of this status, they choose not to go to court when they are mistreated by the farm owners they pick fruit for. If they did, their case would be dismissed because the immigrant farm worker could face deportation. This way, it was impossible for a Latino to win.

Then César Chavez (1927-1993) decided to take a stand just like Dr. King did. He formed several labor unions that would pressure farm owners to give Latino workers better treatment, just like how Dr. King helped form organizations to help African Americans. This is an example of how a

mass of organized and united people were able to get their rights. The US would have more power if they could unite like the Latino labor unions.

“Let freedom reign” from the highest mountain to the lowest plain. Let freedom reign from the north to the south and be felt by every age group. Let the adults include others from other races and treat them as their equal. Let children be raised in a world where skin color is only admired, not the cause of disdain. Everyone should live in harmony and let the dream extend to every person. Marching forward and running free, we strive to act unified and strong!

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